

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A software license manager system, comprising:  
a plurality of application programs;  
a plurality of license certificates that authorize  
use of corresponding ones of the application programs;

5 license retrieval protocols associated with and  
operable by the application programs to request license  
authorizations, each of the protocols being associated  
and operable with a predetermined license manager; and

10 a second license manager operable to intervene and  
perform at least a portion of the functions otherwise  
performed by a plurality of the predetermined license  
managers.

2. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which the second license manager is operable  
transparently to the plurality of application programs.

3. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which the application programs include a facility that  
enables their selective operation with a predetermined  
license manager or with the second license manager.

4. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which the second license manager serves as a central  
license manager for substantially all of the application  
programs in a computer.

5. The software license manager system of claim 1, in which the second license manager serves to centralize and replace software operations normally performed by a plurality of predetermined license managers.

6. The software license manager system of claim 4, in which the license certificates are associated with, controlled and dispensed by the central license manager.

7. The software license manager system of claim 4, including a plurality of the predetermined license managers and the plurality of the predetermined license managers being operationally coupled with the central license manager.

8. The software license manager system of claim 1, including at least one predetermined license manager and the second license manager being operable to handle and store license use historical information.

9. The software license manager system of claim 8, in which the license certificates are associated with and directly controlled by the at least one predetermined license manager.

10. The software license manager system of claim 9,  
in which the at least one predetermined license manager  
is coupled to the second license manager and uses the  
second license manager as a repository for its license  
5 certificates.

11. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which the second license manager is operable by  
intercepting API (Application Program Interface) calls  
issued by the plurality of application programs.

12. The software license manager system of claim  
11, in which the second license manager intercepts the  
API calls by carrying out a hooking process.

13. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which the second license manager intercepts API calls  
by renaming modules.

14. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which the second license manager intercepts an API  
call by executing exit routines.

15. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which the system is operable to obtain for the  
application programs license certificates without  
assistance from any predetermined license manager.

16. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which, where the predetermined license manager has an  
API library that is provided as a shared runtime library  
or an executing agent process, the second license manager  
5 replaces the API library of the predetermined license  
manager with a shared runtime library or agent process  
thereof.

17. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
in which the second license manager has a translator that  
includes a facility that provides data compatibility  
between itself and the protocols associated with a  
5 plurality of the predetermined license managers.

18. The software license manager system of claim  
17, in which the facility of the second license manager  
is operable to provide one or more of the following  
functionalities:

- 5 (a) temporary data elements, if necessary, to  
contain translated data for use in API calls;
- (b) data elements in a format of one or more  
tables, lists, files to retain relevant data  
elements for one or more of the predetermined  
10 license manager protocols or the second license  
manager and their status across multiple API calls;
- (c) conversion tables between data variables;  
and

15 (d) aliases to enable the protocols of the  
predetermined license manager or the second license  
manager to reference the same data where the  
respective formats are different.

19. The software license manager system of claim  
17, in which the second license manager comprises a  
plurality of data translations procedures that are  
implemented individually within a translator facility of  
5 the second license manager.

20. The software license manager system of claim  
19, in which the plurality of data translation procedures  
are implemented:

5 (a) individually within the translator of the  
second license manager;

(b) as a separate runtime library of  
procedures that can be executed by API calls;

(c) as an external agent process; or

10 (d) by intercepting API calls of the  
predetermined license manager.

21. The software license manager system of claim 1,  
further including at least one predetermined license  
manager and including a license certificate translator  
that is operable for translating license certificates  
5 created for the predetermined license manager to license  
certificates that are compatible with license certificate

formats associated with the second license manager and vice versa.

5 22. The software license manager system of claim 21, in which the license certificate translator has a first set of procedures that are invoked to determine if the license certificate translator is to be employed in whole or part.

5 23. The software license manager system of claim 22, in which the first set of procedures operate by reference to a knowledge base or by calls to application program interface calls of the predetermined license manager.

5 24. The software license manager system of claim 21, in which the license certificate translator is linked in part into the at least one predetermined license manager as an object code, as a shared runtime library, or as an executing process that is accessed via its own set of API calls.

25. The software license manager system of claim 1, including at least one predetermined license manager which operates with the second license manager as dual license managers.

26. The software license manager system of claim 25, in which the at least one predetermined license manager and the second license manager cooperate to use their respective license certificates.

27. The software license manager system of claim 1, in which the second license manager develops license management information.

28. The software license manager system of claim 1, including at least one predetermined license manager having a facility for making API calls to the second license manager to obtain license certificates.

29. The software license manager system of claim 28, in which the at least one predetermined license manager communicates license use data to the second license manager for storage therein.

30. The software license manager system of claim 28, in which the software license manager system operates without any predetermined license managers.